CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION
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Being a study of the constitutional and political procedures and functions of Parliamentary democracy in Singapore since independence till 1980, this thesis is devoted to analysing the factors that led to the establishment of an authoritarian regime in that country. It also goes into the measures adopted by People's Action Party (PAP) government in this process and the extent of success achieved by it.

During the period between 1965 to 1980, Singapore achieved remarkable economic development. This was in the framework of a high degree of political stability. All through this period, the PAP was able to win the elections with an absolute majority. There was not a single opposition member in the Parliament. The electoral victory of the PAP was partly due to its achievements in field of economy and partly due to the authoritarian methods used by the government.

The policies and methods used by the PAP government had both positive and negative aspects. The PAP government gave priority to economic development over politics. PAP's ideology of survival aimed at achieving a society where all the citizens have rising incomes and a decent standard of living. PAP achieved all the qualities that are necessary for a successful economy - rapid economic growth, rise in the standard of living and absence of financial corruption. Under the rule of the PAP government, Singapore reached the level of full employment and high rate of literacy and provided flats to almost eighty per cent of the population. Singaporeans
enjoyed high standard of health due to access to health services, strict health control measures and general improvement in the standard of living. For a large part of the population, the realisation of the goals of full employment, high standard of living, housing, health and education made immediate sense. The success of the Housing and Development Board in providing houses on a large scale not only reinforced the government's legitimacy but also demonstrated its high degree of capability. Quite interestingly, allotment of houses to the people of all different races in proportion to their number in the country's population contributed to PAP's policy of multi-racialism and hence nation building.

PAP's policies towards trade unions also benefitted the working class. The workers were given pensions, sick leave and other benefits. People were willing to give up certain liberties for relatively good material life. They were reluctant to confront the government openly because the latter's policies would affect them personally. They cooperated with the government for material benefits by returning the PAP to power in every election. The electorate voted for the ruling party candidates because of the feeling that by voting for the opposition party candidates, their constituency might not get the same benefits provided by the ruling party at the center.

All these developments were achieved at a price which the people had to pay. The government used several non-democratic
measures to eliminate the opposition. The policies and practices used to suppress the dissent in the country's Parliamentary system of democracy like detention without trial, deregistration and replacement of radical trade unions with complacent ones, withdrawal of licenses of newspapers that were alleged to be opposed to national interest and political re-education of civil servants to make them adopt the policies and objectives of the ruling party were some of the examples of the undemocratic stance of the PAP. Most of the opposition members, who could pose a threat to PAP were arrested and detained under Internal Security Act (ISA) and Criminal Law (Temporary Provisions) Act. The government usually kept a close watch on the activities and statements and speeches of the opposition party members. The people who held opinions contrary to those of the government leaders were punished by the government for defamation under ISA.

In this oppressive environment, the opposition parties could neither mobilise the masses nor recruit sufficient number of candidates for election. Suppression of the left wing political leaders enabled the ruling party to monopolise political power. Before independence the left wing leaders of the PAP were very popular. The PAP detained most of them under Internal Security Act (ISA) and eliminated the opposition.

The opposition parties while criticising the government failed to come out with an alternative agenda. Their weakness lay in the repressive policies of the PAP government.
For a functional system of democracy, free flow of information in the society is a pre-requisite for its success. Ignoring this, the government controlled radio and television. The PAP used them for its own and that of government's interests. The PAP used them even for election campaigning. The opposition had no such facilities. Even the newspapers which criticised the government were either closed down or could not get their licenses renewed. It clearly meant that free speech had been "virtually extinguished" and that the Singapore press was "in chains".

The ballot papers used in the elections were numbered with a signed counter-foil of voters. This would reveal the names of the people who voted for the candidates of opposition parties. A sort of fear of government's adverse action forced the people to vote for the ruling party. They were afraid that voting for opposition candidates might jeopardise their future prospects.

Another method to eliminate the opposition was to deny education to the students who failed to get suitability certificates. The students who were associated with opposition parties could not get suitability certificates. Based on political discrimination this sort of treatment to the youth holding opinions different from those of the PAP government leaders was no less than denial of fundamental rights of liberty.

In Singapore, unlike in other democratic countries,
legislature was rendered subordinate to the executive due to the absence of opposition parties' representation in the legislature. The Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew believed that checks and balances between the legislature and the executive were necessary only where the ruling party did not work for the people's interests. He said that since the PAP worked for the welfare of the people checks and balances were not necessary. He felt that his plans for Singapore's progress were beyond criticism. Any one who opposed the ruling party and disagreed with the government's policies was considered anti-Singaporean. He always considered the measures used by the government to eliminate opposition necessary measures.

Having achieved political dominance, the PAP government gave priority to economy. This could be seen from the way the government continued to tamper with democratic practices. Interestingly it accepted the electoral practices. Its aim seemed to be to seek legitimacy for its repressive policies through its ideology of pragmatism and survival doing whatever necessary to survive including the acceptance of its policies of state interventions and authoritarianism.

Public housing, which was considered an important factor in the promotion of Singaporean national identity, sought to disperse the working class into different localities and thereby making them all the more dependent on the government for employment opportunities and other welfare measures. It eventually resulted in a sort of forced disorganization of the
workers' community. Moreover, though the welfare measures like provisions of housing, health, pension and other services were provided to the workers, alternative channels of livelihood were eliminated. Political loyalty to the state was induced. The people were forced to purchase large part of their requirements for livelihood from the state. Livelihood of the working class was very much connected with their loyalty to the state. This way, unknowingly, or under compulsion, the forced submission of the working class came to be treated as a sort of formal consent to the undemocratic policies of the PAP government. It also increased income disparities. Very poor people found Housing Development Board flats highly expensive.

On the other hand, the free will of the people was curtailed by the interventionist policies. The fundamental rights of freedom of speech, expression etc. were curtailed by the frequent use of Internal Security Act and the Newspaper and Printing Press Act.

Through education also, the government reinforced the ideas and objectives of the PAP and tried to induce loyalty to the state. The PAP members controlled the administration of the universities. By enforcing changes in the management of schools by revising syllabuses, by introducing PAP members into teachers' unions, and reorganising and de-emphasising Chinese-medium education, the government brought the network of schools under state control. The government took stringent
measures to eliminate communist influence in Nanyang University and other educational institutions.

Singapore inherited an experienced and efficient bureaucratic structure from the British colonial government. The government’s active participation in the economy and business of the country entailed a high degree of efficiency and cooperation of the bureaucrats. As a result the latter became a significant instruments of the party. The partnership between the two accelerated the fusion of their identity. This in turn led to the institutionalisation of party and eventually rendered it synonymous with the state.

The bureaucracy produced a ruling elite that worked hard with discipline and conformity. It worked single mindedly for economic growth and tolerated no dissention. It resembled more a "well run business corporation than a government". Its ministers worked more like a "board of directors than a cabinet". The technical and national problems were to be solved by experts. This reduced popular participation in the process of decision-making because people did not have requisite knowledge to solve these problems.

The harmful effects of the elitist concept of democracy was more apparent in Singapore’s family planning programme. The Abortion Act of 1969 was based on the belief that unskilled workers, poor and uneducated produced below average children while professionals and educated parents produced intelligent children. An authoritarian by instinct and a
stickler for discipline, Lee Kuan Yew, the Prime Minister, promoted mass obedience by fitting people into a regimented routine of life.

The government intervened in each and every sphere of private life of the individuals. Every individual was controlled by the state by being an employee of civil service or government's enterprises. The government's control over economy through licensing and other administrative procedures increased its control over individuals.

Though petty bribery was unknown in Singapore, political corruption indirectly existed. Falling in line with the government's way of thinking was necessary or the easy way out for allotment of residential apartments.

The extensive organisational network built by the PAP at the grass-root level enabled it to mobilise and control the people. The para political institutions performed vital functions in acting as instruments of communication between the government and the people. They initiated a host of community based activities. Over a time, people tended to accept close identity between the informal leaders and the party branches. The rapid growth of Community Centers in 1962 and the Citizen's Consultative Committees in 1965 resulted in firmly establishing the government's presence among the people.

The political atmosphere was such that the individuals lost interest in the political affairs of the country. There
was no incentive for people to join politics because of the repressive policies of the government and also because it provided little income for anybody except for those in ministerial and related offices. The substantial salaries paid to the latter were justified as necessary measures to prevent corruption caused by low wages.

PAP was also not a mass-based political party. Its Secretary General Lee Kuan Yew had complete control over the party. PAP was controlled by its Central Executive Committee (CEC). Only CEC members could choose cadres.

The compact geographical setting and small size of the country contributed to creating the "concentrated and coordinated political apparatus" and made it possible for it to control the entire society.

The government, in practice disregarded the fundamental liberties of the people. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew believed that a sense of identity could be promoted through T.V. programmes, apartments and jobs. That is why, inspite of all the commendable features and its achievements in economy, Singapore continued to be labelled as "authoritarian" regime or "police state". The PAP government even though it successfully dealt with the material problems of nation building, had over the years reduced social and political space within which Singaporeans were to operate. The concept of social discipline was emphasised. PAP government through grass-root institutions, devoted considerable resources to
their maintenance and effectiveness. Pragmatism, multi-racialism and meritocracy were the fundamental elements of PAP's philosophy.

The government tended to impose anti-democratic laws through Parliamentary enactments. Still it claimed to be democratic because it was always winning through regular and unhampered elections. It claimed to be democratic in order to maintain a good image of popularly elected government and this was considered essential for political and economic stability.

Singapore is a small country with no natural resources. When the country became independent in 1965, it was suffering from poverty and unemployment. Therefore these policies were necessary to maintain communal harmony and to establish political and economic stability. But the fall-out of the high level of economic and social development achieved virtually tended to negate the basic tenets of parliamentary democracy, the fundamental rights and liberties of the individual.